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## The training of the religion teacher

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**Abstract.** The most complete knowledge of the situation of the Christian family today and the deeper understanding of its spiritual vocation in the Church and society are imposed as two fundamental coordinates of the teacher of religion. This fact evokes the need for faithfulness and discernment for the faith of every Christian, as well as his need to face the complex reality of today's society. Respecting the missionary principles of the Church and those of general pedagogy, the religion teacher has several pedagogical roles. The continuous formation of educators who teach religion in schools foresees a necessary and mandatory missionary involvement of the Church.

**Keywords.** Christian educator, religion teacher, Christian missionary, education, religion classes

### 1. The religion teacher a Christian educator

For the didactic activity to be successful, the religion teacher must be a good Christian, practitioner of a religious life and aware of his mission to shape the souls of students. The activity of the religion teacher must not be limited to the transmission of information or knowledge, but must be dedicated to his mission and be able to teach students to make connections between the solutions found in certain contexts and the current problems of today's society. Also, for a teacher to be a Christian educator, he must be strong in words and deeds, be gentle, honest, generous<sup>1</sup>.

The Christian educator has a double mission: to teach his students to acquire the values of faith and to lead them on the path that leads to the salvation of souls. For this fact, the teacher must know the Christian faith well and constantly check the mental and moral state of each student.

For the formation of the students' personality, it is necessary for the religion teacher to ensure an external educative-formative environment. After this, it is necessary for the Christian educator to ensure the students' assimilation of some knowledge, which is based not only on the teacher's specialized training, but also on the adaptation of teaching according to each individual

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<sup>1</sup> **Jacques Delors**, *Comoara lăuntrică. Raportul către UNESCO al Comisiei Internaționale pentru Educație în secolul XXI (The treasure within. Report to UNESCO of the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century)*, Polirom Publishing House, Iași, 2000, p. 123.

student. This fact requires the individualization of the act of learning and training in accordance with the internal, subjective and relatively different conditions from one child to another<sup>2</sup>.

The role of the Christian educator results from the complex process of preparing students in the knowledge and practice of the faith. In this context, the religion teacher fulfills the role of both missionary and educator, having a formative joy based on a responsible and giving attitude.

## **2. The religion teacher – Christian missionary**

Education is a synergistic act between people. More precisely, this synergy is achieved between teachers and students and between teachers and parents because education is closely related to the human quality of the factors involved in its achievement. At the same time, education is also a theandric act, being the consequence of the synergy between God and man, not just an exclusively human action. This last aspect occurs due to the fact that the Christian educator testifies to the truth revealed by the Divinity. For this reason, any didactic activity without God is useless. The mission of the religion teacher is included in the Christian mission, which is based on sending the Church into the world for the purpose of preaching the Gospel and the saving work of the Son of God with the help of the Grace received from the Holy Spirit<sup>3</sup>. Thus, the Christian educator is a confessor of God and must represent the image of the ideal pedagogue and father of young people because he harmonizes in his being the essential qualities, under the three aspects: intellectual, physical and moral. The teacher of religion represents the person who is inspired without interruption by the personality of the greatest Educator of mankind, Jesus Christ, before whom the multitudes were amazed by His teaching and glorified Him (Matthew 7, 28; 22, 33; Mark 11, 18; Luke 4, 15; 4, 32), because he taught them as the One who has power (Mark 1, 22; 1,27) in words and deeds (Luke 24, 19)<sup>4</sup>.

In the context of the synergy between teachers and students, it is necessary to optimize the quality of interactions between them. In the missionary context of teaching religion, the process of intensifying the confession of faith is necessary, both through words and deeds. That is why the Christian mission is based on sending the Church into the world with the aim of evangelizing people and living according to Christian teachings. In this sense, the teacher of religion must have a faith lived in the Church, based on the Christian mission and spirituality, as essential elements of the Christian life. That is why religious education is an important aspect of the Church's mission in the world in which we live. In today's educational system, the Christian educator must be continuously formed through research skills, the ability to work interdisciplinary, and awareness of responsibility to students. The religion teacher is the person who is characterized by the love he has for God, for the students, for the students' families and for the subject he teaches. A true and sincere love for God means a total love for all of God's creation. The Christian educator has not only the professional duty to impart religious knowledge to students, but also the duty to preach the Gospel of Christ to his students. The

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<sup>2</sup> **Gabriel Albu**, *O psihologie a educației (A psychology of education)*, Publishing House of the European Institute, Iași, 2005, p. 315.

<sup>3</sup> **Valer Bel**, *Misiunea Bisericii în lumea contemporană. Premise teologice (The Church's mission in the contemporary world. Theological premises)*, Cluj-Napoca University Press Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 2004, p. 19.

<sup>4</sup> **Dorin Opreș** and **Ioan Scheau**, *Educația din perspectiva valorilor (Education from a values perspective)*, tome I, Aeternitas Publishing House, Alba-Iulia, p. 69.

conscience of the apostolate must be possessed by every religious teacher in order to truly be a disciple of Jesus Christ<sup>5</sup>.

As is known, each student has the possibility to follow various types or moral-behavioral patterns throughout the schooling period. Therefore, it is advisable that the models the students want to follow are truly examples pleasing to the Creator. Thus, education must be centered on values and models through which to make the transition from the theoretical part to the practical part, emphasizing the achievement of goals that are based on the fulfillment of the Divine will. In fact, there are no contradictions between the pedagogy of values and the pedagogy of models because models represent the embodiment of values<sup>6</sup>. The Christian values that the Christian educator imparts to each student are assimilated and embodied through human models. The religion teacher can be a priest or layman. However, he must follow Christ and be a disciple of Christ, being aware of the mission he has to fulfill. He must be a positive example regarding the mission of the Church in the world and build in the hearts of the students the spiritual fortress of the Holy Spirit. Also, the teacher must preach the teaching of the Church, so that he is truly a teacher who teaches students the fear of God (Psalms 33, 11). Christianity must not be understood as an ideology because it is not an ideology, but must be understood as a way of life embodied in deeds. In this way, students can better understand what authentic moral values mean and are.

### **3. The religion teacher – promoter of effective learning**

The professionalism of the religion teacher is based on motivation and high ability in the religious field, but also on the ability to think and act creatively and effectively. The possession of knowledge in the religious field and didactic knowledge, together with the accumulated teaching experience can provide original and competent associations that lead to the creativity and efficiency of the effort made by the teaching staff.

A religious educator who shows professionalism has an open and honest attitude towards each of his students. Similarly, the motivation of each teacher is manifested in the respectful and affectionate support of his students. Determining a Christian behavior is based on the responsibility of the teaching staff to create an atmosphere conducive to the search and application of optimal solutions in any situation in everyone's life. To encourage this, the aim is for the religion teacher to respect the opinion of the students, to encourage their thinking, to create a beneficial atmosphere for the religion courses and to favor the debate of the problems encountered by the students. All this aims to strengthen and promote harmonious and stable relationships between students and teachers, indispensable to the educational efforts initiated by the Christian educator. The most important way to encourage intrinsic motivation in the educational environment is the classroom atmosphere<sup>7</sup>. Also, the personal example of every religious teacher who promotes responsible and applicable actions to different situations or problems can be an important benchmark for students. Respect, encouragement, stimulation and involvement in the teaching and learning process transforms the limited view of some people who disregard religion classes. The culmination of this transformation leads to the

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<sup>5</sup> **Laetitia Leonte**, *Ucenicul lui Hristos. Îndrumări metodice pentru predarea religiei în școli (Disciple of Christ. Methodical guidelines for teaching religion in schools)*, Crater Publishing House, Bucharest, 1998, p. 31.

<sup>6</sup> **Liviu Antonesei**, *Paideia. Fundamentele culturale ale educației (Paideia. Cultural foundations of education)*, Polirom Publishing House, Iași, 1996, p. 25.

<sup>7</sup> **Teresa Amabile**, *Creativitatea ca mod de viață. Ghid pentru părinți și profesori (Creativity as a way of life. Guide for parents and teachers)*, Scientific and Technical Publishing House, Bucharest, 1997, p. 165.

realization that religion classes are of utmost necessity because the students, together with the teacher, are searching for answers, shaping their own identity and that of those around them. Thus, religious education helps the student to accumulate experiences and supports him in his efforts and problems, gradually giving him the opportunity to become a confident and independent person<sup>8</sup>.

By interacting with students, the religion teacher assesses their skills and knowledge, aiming to identify and develop their positive aspects and successes. That is why the evaluation must have more of an informative character than a control one. At this point, students will understand that the observations made by the educator should not be perceived as punishments or rewards resulting from their control, but as useful information about their own level of learning<sup>9</sup>. Thus, the evaluation of students must be approached with tact so as to strengthen the confidence of each student, creating the premises for self-evaluation. In this sense, the purpose of the assessment will be to correct problems, find effective solutions and form deep thinking and understanding of concrete situations. Regarding rewards for student effort, it is advisable for the teacher to provide students with "intangible" rewards. These types of rewards are motivational and very easy to give: a smile or a nod of approval, a word of encouragement or the presentation of the results of their activity or extra work<sup>10</sup>.

For the religion teacher to be a promoter of effective learning and a motivating factor, he must establish a personal didactic communication in which students feel appreciated, even if there may be communication barriers with the teacher. To be effective, didactic communication must have certain characteristics. Thus, the religion teacher's communication with his students must be of high quality, and the teaching of the lessons must have a clear, precise language, without ambiguous wording. Likewise, teachers must use a language accessible to students, corresponding to their age and level of understanding and correct from a grammatical and scientific point of view, having a logical structure of the lessons taught and ensuring a beneficial atmosphere for communication<sup>11</sup>. The relationship between teacher and student presupposes the recognition of the role of students in the logic of education. Also in this context, the Christian educator needs the removal of obstacles that can disrupt an effective didactic communication. Many of the causes for which communication is not optimal happen because some conflicting situations arise between students or between the teaching staff and students. An education without religiosity is incomplete and cannot meet the expectations of those receiving educational support<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> **Marie Haddou**, *Cum să-ți întărești încrederea în tine (How to strengthen your confidence in yourself)*, Trei Publishing House, Bucharest, 2004, p. 163.

<sup>9</sup> **Gabriel Albu**, *Introducere într-o pedagogie a libertății. Despre libertatea copilului și autoritatea adultului (Introduction to a pedagogy of freedom. About the child's freedom and the adult's authority)*, Polirom Publishing House, Iași, 1998, p. 300.

<sup>10</sup> **Teresa Amabile**, *Creativitatea ca mod de viață. Ghid pentru părinți și profesori (Creativity as a way of life. Guide for parents and teachers)*, Scientific and Technical Publishing House, Bucharest, 1997, p. 180.

<sup>11</sup> **Ion Jinga** and **Elena Istrate**, *Manual de Pedagogie (Pedagogy Manual)*, All Publishing House, Bucharest, 2006, p. 211-212.

<sup>12</sup> **Monica Opreș**, **Dorin Opreș**, **Mușata Bocoș**, *Cercetarea pedagogică în domeniul educației religioase (Pedagogical research in the field of religious education)*, Reintegrarea Publishing House, Alba-Iulia, 2004, p. 13.

#### **4. The religion teacher - partner in the educational mission, alongside the family**

Children's education is a responsibility that involves the action of several factors. The cooperation between family and school must go beyond the formalism installed in the world. Therefore, the role of the religion teacher in the relations with the family foresees several aspects related to the educational success of the students. Thus, the emphasis will be placed on the transition to a student-centered educational system, on capitalizing on the potential of education among students and on considering the school as a coordinating center of the educational environment. Therefore, religious teachers are encouraged to adopt diverse learning styles and practice varied methods in educational instruction<sup>13</sup>. An important aspect of educating children today is to make parents responsible for their own children's schooling. For this reason, the mother is known to be the first to provide religious assistance to her own child. This fact does not belong to the religion teachers or the school because the first years of the child's life are spent in the family. Also from his mother, the child learns daily the prayers addressed to God. This custom is always found in truly Christian families<sup>14</sup>. All of these are examples of how society benefits from exceptional education because the family is the first educational environment for children. But today's reality reveals that illiteracy has reached alarming proportions. Today we are faced with the inability of many parents to make optimal choices for their children's education, to help their children overcome some gaps in understanding the knowledge transmitted in the classroom, to assume the mission of being educators of their own children. For all these shortcomings, the history of the Church offers us numerous examples of Christian families that can be models to follow in our days. Exceptional personalities and models of mothers and Christian women are: Antuza, mother of Saint John the Golden Mouth, Macrina, grandmother of Saint Basil the Great and Saint Gregory of Nyssa, Nona, mother of Saint Gregory of Nazianzus, Monica, mother of Blessed Augustine. Prayer, love and personal example are far more persuasive than words. That's why these three qualities give value to words when we have to bring our children to faith in God.

The current situation of education highlights the need for the active involvement of parents in the educational process in which children are involved. Therefore, this context offers the family a special role and a special contribution that are fulfilled within the connection and cooperation between the Church, the family and the school. Although recently the connection between teachers and family has decreased considerably, there are still many opportunities for this connection to be reconstituted. The consultative dialogue between parents and teachers and the home visit occupy an important place in the consolidation of children's education, which acquires new dimensions and goals<sup>15</sup>. The contemporary social context outlines the important values of family harmony, identity and cohesion, which can highlight both the living example of parents and respect for the value of education. The family is not only a transmitter, i.e. a subject of the requirements of school education, but also a receiver, i.e. an object of didactic efforts, based on the cooperation between the church, school and family. More precisely, it is

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<sup>13</sup> **Speranța Țibu, Delia Goia**, *Parteneriatul școală-familie-comunitate (The school-family-community partnership)*, University publishing house, Bucharest, 2014, p. 39-40.

<sup>14</sup> **St. Vladimir, Metropolitan of Kiev**, *Despre educație (About education)*, translation: Adrian Tănăsescu-Vlas, Sophia Publishing House, Bucharest, 2003, p. 80.

<sup>15</sup> **Tudor Opriș**, *Drama învățământului românesc de azi (The drama of Romanian education today)*, Roza Vânturilor Publishing House, Bucharest, 2004, p. 59.

the family that lays the foundations of religious education, and the school, through its teachers, completes this work by means of education conducted over several years.

The family represents an important factor of the Church because, for every Christian, the goal of the family's mission is the closeness in love of its members, according to the model of communion full of love and sacrifice through which Jesus founded His Church. The family and the Church together represent a solid, current and present order for people<sup>16</sup>. As is known, the primary meaning of the Church is that of a gathering that confesses God. This fact can only be fulfilled through full communion in the Holy Eucharist. The family environment is a testimony of a space of prayer, self-giving and love. As is known, each child has his own personality and is endowed with qualities and talents that God gives him. Thus, each child is like a fine jewel that requires instrumentation and skill of great craftsmanship, both from the religious teachers and from the family<sup>17</sup>.

In order for a student to come to attend Church not out of obligation, but voluntarily, consciously and involved, a synergy is needed between the factors involved, starting with the family, and continuing with the school, the priest and the parish. All these factors are responsible both in the process of educating and in the process of Christianizing the child, helping him to become not only an earthly man, but a heavenly man. Even though many people recognize the value of religious belief, too few embrace faith as a way of life<sup>18</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> Constantin Cuciuc, *Sociopsihologia religiei (Sociopsychology of religion)*, Conscience and Freedom Publishing House, Bucharest, 2006, p. 249.

<sup>17</sup> Ernest Bernea, *Trilogie pedagogică (Pedagogical trilogy)*, Dacia publishing house, Cluj-Napoca, 2002, p. 128.

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